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ABSTRACT

In order to provide high quality training to paraprofessionals employed in state-funded Child Day Care Centers, an innovative instructional program was developed based on the need to offer training in convenient commuting locations and to recruit and train unlicensed paraprofessionals from cultural and linguistic backgrounds similar to those of the children they served. Coursework at California State University, San Bernadino, was based on the Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program's curriculum standards, and focused on the first level of training leading to the Emergency Children's Center Instructional Permit. Twenty-two paraprofessionals (16 Hispanic, 6 Anglo) completed all program coursework. The program met state goals and identified and implemented procedures to meet local needs, and day care center observations indicated a need for special education strands within the coursework. Many of the day care centers were located in isolated areas and served migrant, multicultural, poor populations with a potentially high incidence of unserved handicapped children. Evaluation results showed that trainees felt increased self-confidence, had improved observational skills, had a stronger understanding of the rationale for specific group and individual activities with children, and benefited most from courses which applied theory to actual practice. The model demonstrated the importance of incorporating local needs into personnel training. (PM)

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An Innovation in Rural Paraprofessional Training

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Running head: INNOVATION IN PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING

RC015388

An Innovation in Rural Paraprofessional Training

In the Spring of 1984, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) was selected to participate in an innovative paraprofessional day care training program. The accredited instructional program was developed through an interagency agreement of state universities and community colleges with California State University, Fresno, serving as the prime contractor (Cervantes, 1985). Funding for this project was made available through the Child Development Division of the California State Department of Education. The primary purpose of the project was to provide high quality training to paraprofessionals currently employed in State funded Child Day Care Centers. Program rationale was based on the need to offer training in convenient commuting locations and to recruit and train unlicensed paraprofessionals from cultural and linguistic backgrounds similar to the children they serve. The program was developed on a "block class" concept for paraprofessionals seeking to qualify for the Emergency Children's Center Instructional Permit, the Emergency Permit Renewal, the Children's Center Regular Instructional Permit, and/or the Administration and Supervision Children's Center Permit. The coursework in the State program was based on curriculum standards established by the Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program (CDANCP), which includes an emphasis on bilingual education.

Program Description

The CSUSB regional program focused on the first level of training leading to the Emergency Children's Center Instructional Permit. Twenty-two paraprofessionals successfully completed all program coursework. Of the twenty-two, 16 (73%) were Hispanic and 6 (27%) were Anglo. Coursework offered during the Spring semester of 1984, was composed of 12 semester units which met CDANCP requirements. The CSUSB program not only met the State goals, but also identified and implemented procedures to meet local needs. During planning sessions, observations in day care centers and discussions with potential participants, the need to incorporate special education strands into coursework became clear. This finding is consistent with the literature evidencing a significant need for personnel training in special education (Burton & Chavez, 1984), particularly for those who work in rural settings with multicultural children (Chavez & Lopez, 1984).

Many day care centers in the CSUSB project service region are located in isolated areas where large numbers of migrant and multicultural populations live and work. The transient nature and the economic status of this population increases the possibility of a higher incidence of unserved handicapped children (Barresi, 1982 and Helge, 1981). It is further recognized that personnel training in rural special education constitutes a major problem in special education today. Marrs (1984) suggested that one of the most effective ways to meet the needs of rural special education children is to train those who

already live in the rural area and intend to stay there. Thus while meeting the overall goals of the State project, the CSUSB program included special education components in the course content as a means to increase the awareness of local paraprofessionals and to insure a more stable local constituency with knowledge of special education. One-fourth of the required coursework for the Emergency Permit was devoted to specific topics in special education including: abnormal child development, early screening and referral, observation and recording techniques, individualized instruction, and intervention strategies with exceptional children.

Program Evaluation

Throughout the program course, total program and self evaluations were solicited from trainees. Results revealed that trainees benefitted most from those courses which applied theory into actual practice in their work settings. Two courses focusing on special education were included in this group. Center Directors were most positive in their evaluation of the program. In particular, they reported that the trainees used a variety of activities and materials with children, demonstrated pride in their work, and evidenced an understanding of normal and irregular child development. In addition, trainees expressed self-confidence in themselves, increased appreciation for their jobs, improved observational skills, and a stronger understanding of the rationale for specific group and individual activities with children.

This successful paraprofessional training program has served as a model for others and has demonstrated the importance of incorporating local needs into personnel training. Plans are underway to extend the program and to provide the next level of training to participants during the Spring of 1935.

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